

APPENDIX F: AMERICAN INDIAN MEETINGS

A vital component of the Lower Mississippi Delta Heritage Study has been identifying some of the elements needed for implementation of section 1104 of the Delta Initiatives — the establishment of a Delta Region Native American Heritage Corridor and Heritage and Cultural Center. The intent of the legislation was to develop creative strategies to preserve heritage resources, provide for visitor enjoyment of the region, and to stimulate the regional economy through heritage tourism. Although it is beyond the scope of the heritage study to make specific recommendations for location of a center, corridor boundaries, or necessary funding, the study does present possible resource combinations for preserving and presenting to visitors the important American Indian heritages of the Delta (see Concept 5, Volume I).

Early in the study process the National Park Service initiated consultation meetings with federally recognized tribes that might have an interest in the Lower Mississippi Delta Region initiatives legislation and heritage study. At meetings in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Oklahoma, tribal representatives were invited to provide input on the important stories and resources of the Delta related to American Indians. In addition to the formal meetings with tribal representatives, tribal members from Cherokee and Choctaw tribes participated in a symposium on the “Stories of the Delta” in Memphis, Tennessee.

Five federally recognized Indian tribes, i.e., a government-to-government relationship that formally exists between the tribes and the United States, are located within the study area boundaries of the

Lower Mississippi Delta Region — four in Louisiana and one in Mississippi. Following are brief profiles of each of the tribes.

LOUISIANA

Chitamacha Tribe

Encompassing 268 acres, the Chitamacha Reservation is located near the town of Charenton, in the Stain Mary Parish of south-central Louisiana. Archeological evidence suggests that Indian inhabitation of the area dates back at least 6,000 years. The tribe has occupied its present location since 1764, though early 18th century French expeditions nearly exterminated the Chitamacha. Historically the Chitamacha subsisted on fishing, hunting, and agriculture and their artisans were adept at basket weaving and metalwork.

Today, the majority of the Chitamacha labor force is employed in the region’s petroleum industry. The Chitamacha were accorded federal recognition in 1917, and in 1971 the tribe adopted a constitution and bylaws. The tribe is governed by a council of five, all elected to two-year terms. The tribal Office of Education operates an elementary school on the reservation, the only Indian school in the state (Tiller 1996 and Kniffen 1987).

Coushatta Tribe

Euro-American encroachment upon their lands compelled the Coushatta, who were associated with the Creek Confederation of

the Southeast, to migrate westward to present-day Louisiana and Texas during the 18th and 19th centuries. By the mid-19th century, the Coushatta were predominantly settled along the banks of the Calcasieu River and Bayou Blue in western Louisiana, where they hunted, fished, and practiced a maize-based agriculture. Increasing settlement of the area shrunk Coushatta lands, but many continued to farm while others sought employment in the burgeoning timber industry.

The Coushatta Tribe of Allen Parish, Louisiana, obtained federal recognition in 1973 and maintain a tribal health center and recreational complexes, an administrative center, a tribal hall, and a heavy equipment maintenance plant on 200 acres of reservation land. Members of the tribe are primarily employed in tribal service programs, the timber and petroleum industries, or at nearby farms, and the Coushatta operate adult education classes, summer work programs, and reading assistance programs for elementary school children. Elected representatives serve on the tribal council.

Jena Band of Choctaws

The Jena Band of Choctaws in LaSalle Parish, Louisiana, are the descendants of a small number of Choctaw who migrated from Mississippi during the 19th century. Many Jena Choctaw labored as sharecroppers during the 19th and 20th centuries. In the 1980s an heir to farmland upon which many Jena had labored returned to the tribe approximately 5 acres of land on which the Indians maintained an all Choctaw burial area, White Rock Cemetery. Today, the Jena Band operates a tribal center and recreation facility, and tribal members are

predominantly employed in industry or as farmers and loggers (Brown 1989 and 1990, Tiller 1996, and Kniffen 1987).

Tunica-Biloxi Tribe

Approximately 25 miles west of the Mississippi River, in the Avoyelles Parish of east-central Louisiana, is the Tunica-Biloxi Reservation. The reservation, which encompasses 154 acres, is adjacent to Marksville, the nearest city. Originally two separate tribes, the Tunica and Biloxi united politically in the 1920s and although they speak different languages, both are descendants of the region's Mississippian mound builders.

The Tunica-Biloxi were granted federal recognition in 1981, and the tribe is governed by a seven-member elected tribal council. The tribe today raises several dozen head of cattle and a large segment of the Tunica-Biloxi labor force is employed in the gaming industry. The Tunica-Biloxi's Grand Casino Avoyelles is both the largest land based casino in Louisiana and the largest private employer in Avoyelles Parish. The tribe has been negotiating a 100-year lease with the state of Louisiana to manage the Marksville Prehistoric Mounds Park and museum, a state commemorative area.

MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian

The reservation lands of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, the descendants of the few Choctaws who remained behind after the tribe's relocation from their ancestral homelands to the Indian Territory of present-day Oklahoma in the 1830s,

encompass seven communities (Bogue Chitto, Bogue Homa, Conehatta, Pearly River, Redwater, and Standing Pine), in eastern-central Mississippi and total 20,683 acres. Historically the Choctaw lived throughout present-day Mississippi and Alabama and subsisted on hunting and agriculture. Following the Civil War, many Choctaw worked as sharecroppers on non-Indian lands. During the 1950s, the mechanization of farming rendered sharecropping obsolete and the Choctaw unemployment rate soared, until the tribe began developing an industrial park on reservation land in the 1970s. Today, the majority of the Choctaw labor force is employed in manufacturing and construction and the operation of the tribe's Silver Star Resort and Casino.

The establishment of the Choctaw Agency on Indian Affairs in Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1918 represented the first federal recognition of the Choctaw living in Mississippi. In 1944 the reservation was created and the Choctaw Tribal Constitution was adopted in 1945. The reservation is governed by a 16 member tribal council elected from the seven reservation communities. The chief is elected at large from the entire reservation.

MEETINGS WITH TRIBAL REPRESENTATIVES

Philadelphia, Mississippi

Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

The study team met with the tribal archeologist at Philadelphia, Mississippi to discuss the heritage study, the Delta Initiatives legislation, and the Choctaw heritage in the Delta.

The tribal archeologist expressed interest in the project, offered information about

the tribe today and requested to be kept informed of the study's progress.

Marksville, Louisiana

The Tunica-Biloxi Indians of Louisiana hosted a meeting of the federally recognized Louisiana tribes at Marksville, Louisiana in August, 1996. Attendees included Indian representatives from the Tunica-Biloxi, the Chitamacha Tribe, and Jena Band of Choctaw; Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; and the National Park Service, Denver Service Center. The purpose of the meeting was to initiate consultation with tribes in Louisiana that might have an interest in the Lower Mississippi Delta Region Initiatives legislation and Heritage Study.

Tribal participants indicated their concern that the National Park Service consult only with federally recognized tribes during the study process and that the "true" stories of the Louisiana Indian tribes. They also indicated the need to be honest in telling any stories or presenting any materials related to Native American history in the region. There was a brief discussion of what some of the important stories might be related to visitors.

Quapaw, Oklahoma

In March 1997 the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma graciously hosted an informational meeting on the heritage study at their Tribal Community Complex in Quapaw, Oklahoma. The purpose of the meeting was to gain tribal input on the important stories and resources of the Delta related to Native Americans. Tribal input was also requested to aid the National Park Service in better defining

Indian issues and interests within the Lower Mississippi Delta Region.

Below is a brief summary of the Oklahoma meeting.

There was a consensus among Native American participants that the Delta stories need to be told. All groups, especially the Chickasaw in Mississippi, are involved in commemorating their heritage in the Delta. There are annual walks and ceremonies. Some activities already exist but need to be expanded. The question was asked about how these activities tie into the LMDR project. It was explained that they are a starting point for identifying activities, future projects, and interested parties.

The participation/interaction between/among tribes in Oklahoma and Mississippi is irregular and occurs primarily with mayoral activities, historical societies, colleges, etc. This interaction needs to be expanded but it will take a lot of effort on behalf of the tribal representatives.

The Quapaw have current and ongoing interest in developing economic ventures in Arkansas. These interests may tie in nicely with the LMDR project because the tribe is in continual search of monetary support through grants, etc.

The concept was raised that the Delta is the "Motherland or Homeland" of the tribes and nations in Oklahoma. During the removal period the tribes brought with them their culture, dance, food, farming techniques, long houses, and much more. The Trail of Tears is directly associated with the land in the Delta Region. While the Trail of Tears legislation only identifies the Cherokee, numerous groups traversed these removal routes across portions of the Delta. All of their stories

should be told, and the Trail of Tears legislation should be amended to included/identify all groups. How can tribes be involved? They can participate in the Advisory Council and with state chapters. The Arkansas chapter was organized in April 1996.

One Quapaw Tribal member stated, "There is a great need to improve and re-do history of Native Americans in interpretation, education, etc." This same member then asked, "How will the information gathered in the study be used? Does it mean funding? If so, immediately or later? What research materials will be developed?"

One Loyale Shawnee stated, "The Shawnee ties to the Delta include warring, trade, and collection activities."

One Quapaw member stated, "The Quapaw were one of the first tribes in Arkansas. Trade was very important, as well as collection activities, hunting, fishing, village sites, etc." The same person also stated, "Oral history supersedes the written documentation. Thus, it should be considered. Oral history projects should be conducted for an accurate picture of tribal ties to the Delta Region." The same person also stated that there are many current attempts to document language and history by all Oklahoma tribes. The same person continued, "The Quapaw are called the downstream people and occupied the Menard Hodges Mound site in southeastern Arkansas." The site is historic to the Quapaw and that while there is a lack of information about the site and what the Quapaw did there, this doesn't mean information could not be collected from oral history research activities.

A National Park Service representative provided some information about prehistoric occupation of the Delta. Native Americans in 1500 B.C. introduced new things from the south like pottery, sedentism, and certain kinds of plants like corn. By 700 A.D., the eastern U.S. was filled with Hopewellian Culture, a sophisticated culture that spread west to Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and back east again. By 900 A.D. the emergence of the Mississippian Culture was present. Cahokia is the largest such site, in existence until approximately 1300 A.D. Thus, the Delta Region has archeological sites and contemporary sites that all need further interpreted and pulled into the LMDR study.

A statement was made that the LMDR study needs to ensure that the Native Americans' stories that are told and interpreted do not take them back to the "museum Indians." Native American culture and lifeways are ongoing and traditions and cultures have been maintained.

A statement was made that the Removal period affected two generations of Native Americans. During this period tribal and nation members were forced to lose their identity, or at least bury it. After removal, Indians were shunned and shamed. Many Indians remained in the states of Arkansas and Mississippi. Whatever information is collected during this study should be shared with these folks, even though they are not officially tribal members.

The study would accurately interpret that Indian policy was done to Native Americans without Indian involvement.

Not much has been said about Indians in international or national wars, even though

there were many who participated and lost their lives in doing so. Rather, the American Indian was called savage or warrior, and badly portrayed, even in our world wars, let alone the American Revolution or Civil War.

Much Native American history has been lost and needs to be rekindled. The LMDR study provides for this rekindling. The history of these people involves archeological materials, basketry, weaving, beadwork, pottery, oral tradition, the arts (dance and song), ceremony, religion. plant collection activities, and so much more. All of this needs to be folded into the LMDR study.

Things from the past need to be brought into the present and it is the symbolism that is most significant. Bring items in to contemporary ceremonies, arts, crafts, etc.

All the themes identified in this meeting in Quapaw are interconnected and interrelated and should be brought together. These Native American themes interrelate and inter-connect with other ethnic groups, activities, themes, and stories that exist in the Delta Region. This is what needs to be told/recommended in this study. No one group existed without interaction with all the others. Settlement, expansion, removal, waterways, overland trails, plantation, slavery, subjugation, exploitation, culture, war, etc., are all related to each other in some way. This is what is important and needs to be told.

Finally, Native American history, use, and occupation of the Delta should be given/interpreted by Native American, not others.